

State of Alaska
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & SOCIAL SERVICES

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Oseltamivir (Tamiflu®) and other Influenza Antiviral Drugs

Influenza, commonly called “the flu”, is a contagious respiratory illness with symptoms that may include fever, headache, extreme tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, runny or stuffy nose, and muscle aches. The flu that 10 to 20 percent of the American population catch each year, usually during the late fall, winter, or early spring, is referred to as “seasonal flu.” The influenza viruses categorized into groups called influenza A and influenza B cause seasonal flu. Avian influenza H5N1, also known as “bird flu,” is also in the influenza A group.

A number of drugs have been developed to both treat and prevent influenza. The appropriate use and effectiveness of the four medications most commonly used are outlined in the chart below. Each of these drugs is only available by prescription.

	Amantadine (Symmetrel®)	Rimantadine (Flumadine ®)	Zanamivir (Relenza ®)	Oseltamivir (Tamiflu ®)
<i>Treatment*</i>	influenza A	influenza A	influenza A & B	influenza A & B
<i>Prevention</i>	influenza A	influenza A	Not approved	influenza A & B
<i>For Ages...</i>	≥ 1 year of age	≥ 1 year of age –	≥ 7 years of age	≥ 1 year of age
<i>How to take?</i>	A pill taken by mouth	A pill taken by mouth	A dry powder taken by inhaling with a “Diskhaler”	A pill or liquid taken by mouth
<i>How effective are they?</i>	Prevention of influenza A: 70-90 percent effective; Treatment of influenza reduces length of illness by one day if started within two days of becoming ill	Prevention of influenza A: 70-90 percent effective; Treatment of influenza reduces length of illness by one day if started within two days of becoming ill	Prevention of influenza A & B: 70-90 percent effective; Treatment of influenza reduces length of illness by one day if started within two days of becoming ill. It may be effective in treating H5N1.	Prevention of influenza A: 70-90 percent effective; Treatment of influenza reduces length of illness by one day if started within two days of becoming ill. It may be effective in treating H5N1.
<i>What are the side effects?</i>	Possible sleeping problems and anxiousness, nausea or loss of appetite; occasionally severe seizures	Possible sleeping problems and anxiousness, nausea or loss of appetite; occasionally severe seizures	Possible wheezing or serious breathing problems, headache or diarrhea	Possible nausea and vomiting

*These drugs are approved for treatment of uncomplicated influenza, started within two days of the onset of illness. There are no studies of effectiveness of treatment after 2 days of illness, or treatment of complicated influenza illness (e.g. pneumonia).

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